Our Faith

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The Freedom Controversy

JOINT EDITORIAL

The Annual Meeting of the American Unitarian Association in May, by a vote of 220 to 176, tabled the proposal to amend its By-Laws by inserting the phrase "individual freedom of belief is an inherent part of the Unitarian way of life."

To some people this rejection of the proposed amendment may look like a refusal to affirm the right of the individual to believe as he judges best. But it was by no means that, for there is no one amongst us who questions that right. The proponent of the amendment reminded us that the Congregationalists have affirmed that they "hold sacred the freedom of the individual soul and the right of private judgment." Similarly, the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam last year declared that "every person has the right to determine his own faith and creed."

If Unitarians had been asked to vote simply upon the question of whether they hold sacred the right of private judgment, for once there would have been perfect unanimity. And they would understand by it what the Congregationalists and the World Council meant by it; namely, that every man has the inherent right to decide whether to be a Unitarian or a Trinitarian, a Methodist or a Roman Catholic, an Episcopalian or a Baptist, or anything else. If we had been asked to vote for what is normally intended by the phrase "individual freedom of belief," there would have been no controversy at all.

But the real issue was not that. The issue was, Does the word Unitarian have no positive content? Can a man say, for instance, that he is a Unitarian and mean that he may or may not believe in the unipersonality of God, or that he may or may not believe in any God at all, or that he may or may not believe in anything? While no one would want to exclude any Abou ben Adhem from the church, at the same time who would want to include as his equal that other son of Adam who fell upon his brother and killed him? How could anyone, with any hope of intelligibility, say that to be a Unitarian simply means being free to believe indifferently in either love or hate? Yet it is just this unintelligibility that belongs to those who propagandize the equation, "Unitarianism equals Freedom." And so far as one could tell from the phrasing of the rejected amendment, it might have meant just that.

It is hoped that this issue is clear for it will be coming up again. The issue is not whether we believe in the right of every man to be a Unitarian or not as his free soul may direct him. The question is, Can a man call himself a Unitarian and mean nothing in particular by it? Is the word to be emptied, not only of its historical Christian meaning as belief in the unipersonality of God, but also of all positive content whatever? It was against this absurdity, and not against the right of private judgment, that the Annual Meeting had the wisdom to vote.

Davis Becomes Treasurer

JOINT EDITORIAL

The new treasurer of the American Unitarian Association is George G. Davis, who was Director of Church Extension.

Under the By-Laws of the Association, the Treasurer is elected by ballot at the Annual Meeting for a four-year term. If he resigns before the four years are completed, the Directors may appoint another person to serve in his stead until the next Annual Meeting.

This year was the year for the election of a new treasurer. But Mr. Davis was not elected at the Annual Meeting. The Directors, who do the nominating, did not put his name on the ballot to come before the delegates. The name they put on the ballot was that of another man who ran on the understanding that he would resign. Upon being duly elected by the delegates at the Annual Meeting, he resigned to the Directors. The next day the Directors appointed Mr. Davis to the office.

The new treasurer is well known for his non-theistic humanist affiliations. It may have been considered strategic to appoint him as treasurer at this time because it is a question how long humanist fellowships will be content to remain within the Unitarian Association if the Purpose of the Association cannot be amended so as to give them regular standing therein. In the last two years there has been a tendency for them to split off and go along with the ethical-culturist and free-thought groups. So perhaps it was thought that Mr. Davis's appointment would influence them to continue their support.

Mr. Davis must be well aware of the criticisms his predecessor had to face. If he openly satisfies the demand for more detailed financial information, the strangeness of the method by which he was appointed might come to be overlooked.

Why The United Appeal Failed

RALPH E. KYPER
(Minister, Second Parish, Saco, Maine)

It was interesting—in a wry sort of way—to sit through the May Meetings and listen to the curious and devious explanations of the failure of the United Unitarian Appeal. (Of a goal of $350,000 little more than half, or $200,447 to be exact, was raised, falling short of the previous year's total by $60,000.) Judge Brooks attributed this to an alarm on the part of large givers over certain radical trends in our denomination. There may be some truth in this. The Director of the U.U.A. came nearer to the real explanation, but stopped short of the obvious. He blamed the failure on a "lack of enthusiasm," adding that we are taking ourselves too seriously and liberal religion not seriously enough. But why?

Results of the "election" notwithstanding, the failure of the United Appeal is simply and clearly a vote of "no confidence" in our present leadership on the part of our churches and the rank and file of Unitarians. It is a "grass roots" protest against our being led in directions in which we do not care to go. It is regrettable, of course, that what appears to be a method of undercutting should be resorted to; but under our present self-perpetuating and closed-corporation system the people have no other weapon left. We may accept it as an axiom that in asking for voluntary contributions one assumes that the givers are in agreement with the purposes for which *their* money is to be used. And if they are not in agreement . . . well, it's still their money.

The original inception of a United Appeal was one that many of us genuinely welcomed. It gave our ingrown and self-contained churches a goal and purpose outside themselves—a gospel to be spread and sacrificed for. But as time went on we found it harder and harder to raise our quotas—set for us in Boston, of course. In our parishes there were rumblings of dissatisfaction with national policies, growing louder and louder. And ministers cannot be expected to "cover" for our leaders indefinitely.

We are told that, in spite of our inner tensions, Unitarianism is growing. The incredulous Christian asks two questions: (1) Are these new churches really churches, or are they merely ethical-culture societies? (2) How much of the growth is in spite of denominational policy? I can speak for at least one church that is growing—and in blissful ignorance of either Unitarian Advance or the "free-mind principle."

The solution? Yes. Besides a re-examination of the distinction between what is religion and what is not, we endorse the suggestions recently put forth for democratizing our national organization. Beyond this, let us put a limit on official tenure in the By-Laws of the American Unitarian Association. Let us give our people the right of a choice of leadership in place of the "ja und nein" ballots we now mark. Then that leadership will represent Unitarians, and Unitarians will give "not grudgingly or of necessity," but generously and with open hearts.

Alliance Remains "Christian"

The Annual Meeting of the General Alliance of Unitarian and other Liberal Christian

Women held in Boston in May voted on the question of changing its name. The matter raised considerable interest because one of the proposed names would have discarded the word "Christian." The proposed alteration in name did not, however, receive a majority of the votes cast.

The Wider Fellowship

PAUL HARMON CHAPMAN
(U. C. F. Representative at Amsterdam)

The thirteenth congress of the International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom met at Amsterdam in July in the friendly atmosphere of our Dutch hosts. There was study, discussion and worship, but those who met together felt that the tie which bound them was the fellowship from which came deepening friendships, sympathetic understanding, and growing community of interests.

Dr. John H. Lathrop, retiring president of the I.A.R.F., sounded the keynote in his opening address. "Our liberal faith," he said, "must be as broad as the political faith that draws men together in institutions such as the United Nations." It was the task of Liberal Christians "to affirm in this stricken world that human life can only go forward if men believe in the will to righteousness." The way of Jesus was the only way if the human race is to survive. These words of Dr. Lathrop's were supplemented by Professor Van Holk, who urged that the great need of our day is "to uphold the sovereignty of the moral conscience."

The public evening meetings drew large crowds and heard significant utterances. A paper on "The Free Community" by Mr. Chuter Ede, who was held in England by the longshoremen's strike, was read by Rev. John Kielty. It emphasized the importance of meeting today's challenge. "The freedom of the human spirit could never be assured to a generation or nation that is not resolute to defend it. There are always enemies lurking to destroy the sacred cause, and against their efforts the price of liberty is eternal vigilance."

Professor Lavergne of Paris, speaking on "Sovereignty and Freedom," declared that "Christianity is essentially ecumenical and completely ignores national frontiers. Federalism does not set value upon frontiers. It unites neighboring nations into a larger unity. It is a practical expression of Christian universalism and the best possible incarnation of the ecumenical idea."

Dr. P. J. Oud, Lord Mayor of Rotterdam, sounded a similar note. "There is more than the Christianity of the church," he said. "There is a Christianity above differences of faith. Christianity is a great light of which the different creeds are separate rays. It does not remain in the church. It is a social power, a stream which has discharged itself through all the veins of society." Dr. Oud warned against humanist tendencies. "There are people who are ready to accept principles of morality that are based on Christian principles and yet deny these principles. They profess themselves adherents of a humanism which has no root in belief in God." He pointed out that the Dutch had learned the danger of that during the war, when they discovered this godless attitude was the explanation of atrocities and concentration camps. The challenge of the present, he said, is "to restore man's lost faith in the Christian message."

At the final evening session Dr. Preston Bradley took as his text two sentences from Dr. Frederick Eliot's sermon which had been delivered in the morning. "The world is waiting for someone who will put his faith to the final test; the world is waiting for us. We must wait for God, but God may be waiting for us at this moment." In his forceful and dramatic manner Dr. Bradley challenged a statement some speaker had made to the effect that a new and better order will emerge "in God's good time." He pointed to the urgency thrust upon us by our atomic age, and urged that we strive valiantly to bring in the Kingdom of God now, "lest a thousand years of degradation shall come."

As the delegates said goodbye in the courtyard of the Old Remonstrant Church, the hidden church with its stable doors, they carried with them something of that indomitable spirit of their Dutch hosts who have so staunchly defended and maintained liberal Christianity, and succored and supported for centuries the liberals of other lands as well as their own.

"Only religious faith can make the world safe for freedom; only religious faith can make freedom safe for the world."

William Temple

The Common Bond

Speaking at a luncheon in New York on his recent visit to this country, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, medical missionary philosopher of French Equatorial Africa, said that the future of the Protestant church in the world rests on "all of us finding ourselves tied together by our Christian faith."

Letter to U.C.F.

Until a few months ago, I was unaware of your fine publication, OUR FAITH. Upon reading it I knew immediately that the Unitarian Christian Fellowship was exactly what I wanted. For some time I have been unhappy and deeply concerned over the lack of things spiritual—so much so that I have considered withdrawing. Now I am pinning my hopes on this Fellowship, wishing to do something about it in a concrete way.

Just think what a band of like-minded people could do! We could go ahead by leaps and bounds. I am convinced that membership and funds would grow without even asking for them. With spiritual insight and the power of prayer, nothing is impossible.

FLORENCE C. METZ
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Real Religion

"The central assertion of religion, without which it would lose its meaning and its power, is that the seen world about us is not all; that there is an unseen world, a supramundane, spiritual reality, God, with Whom it is possible to be in living relationship, and with Whom it is necessary to be in living relationship in order to achieve well-being and to be satisfied."

From *Things Not Seen* by HERBERT H. FARMER.

Unitarians Ashamed of Their Great Hymns?

JOHN CLARENCE PETRIE
(First Unitarian Church, Houston, Texas)

Searching for suitable prizes for my Sunday School class of Junior High students I looked through my library of Unitarian books and hit upon *Unitarian Faith in Unitarian Hymns.* Just the thing since it is a rich mine of Unitarian devotion! It shows the deep inner faith and spiritual life of the writers. So I ordered several copies from the Beacon Press. Have you guessed the reply I received? "Out of print and no longer available."

Yes, let's erase the record of the Unitarian past in order the more easily to betray the children in our Sunday Schools into accepting the present atheistic pabulum for the faith of Channing and Parker and Clarke and Peabody.

Prayer

(By M. H. in *Daily Devotions*)

We thank thee, O God, that thy light shineth in all places of thy dominion—on the humble as well as on the mighty of the earth. We give thee thanks that thy power knoweth no boundaries. It floweth through the heart of the child as through the words of the wise. Open our ears that we may hear thee wherever we go, whether thou speakest in the high light of the noonday or in the shadows of the night.

Amen

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(Please send to the Treasurer, Mr. Constant Wendell, 102 Mt. Vernon St., Boston, Mass.)

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